

Normal Language Development: Birth to 12 Months

Communication is important for daily living. It forms the basis for social and emotional development, and for learning. Children communicate verbally by developing speech (also called articulation) and language skills. Here are some helpful definitions:

- **Speech** (articulation): the physical production of sounds to form spoken words.
- **Language**: the message that is sent back and forth during talking. This includes understanding the speech of others (receptive language) and using words and sentences to convey a message (expressive language). It also includes using language for social reasons (pragmatics).

Although all children are a little different in their development of speech and language, the following are typical skills that are developed at each stage:

Birth to 3 Months

Understanding

- Is startled by loud sounds
- May stop sucking for a few seconds when hearing a sound
- Smiles or moves when someone speaks
- Watches the speaker's face closely
- Is aware of different voices
- Calms down when hearing a parent's voice

Talking

- Coo by making random vowel sounds
- Makes "happy" sounds, which may include an occasional laugh
- Cries and fusses for attention and to have needs met
- Begins to use different cries to communicate different messages (i.e., I'm wet, cold, hungry, tired, etc.)
- Makes sounds to interact with others
- Begins to imitate sounds

Socializing

- Begins to look into the eyes of others when vocalizing
- Watches faces when people speak
- Smiles and laughs
- Shows interest in people
- Likes to be held



3 to 6 Months

Understanding

- Looks towards a voice or sound
- Likes toys that make sound
- Recognizes own name and some words
- Pays attention to music

Talking

- Takes turns making sounds with a caregiver
- Makes cooing and gurgling sounds when alone
- Becomes louder and raises or lowers voice volume and pitch while cooing
- Makes different sounds to show pleasure or displeasure
- Learns to communicate for something that is wanted by making sounds

Socializing

- Imitates facial expressions
- Uses sounds to ask for more
- Takes turns making sounds with other people
- Is wary of strangers
- Smiles at family members

6 to 9 Months

Understanding

- Stops or turns when his or her name is called
- Recognizes family and pet names
- Understands a few common words
- Pays attention when spoken to
- Is interested in looking at pictures
- Pays attention to music
- Responds to “no” or to a change in tone of voice
- Begins to follow simple commands when someone gestures (i.e., “Come here.”)

Talking

- Babbles using certain sounds like /b/, /m/, /w/, /d/, /n/, and /g/. Babbling consists of syllables repeated over and over (i.e., ma ma ma ma; da da da da, etc.)
- Makes noise at self in mirror, during play, and with music
- Begins to ask for things by reaching and making sounds
- Takes turns copying sounds and syllables with the caregiver

Socializing

- Copies actions and plays games, such as peek-a-boo and patty-cake
- Waves "bye-bye"
- Becomes more interactive

9-12 Months

Understanding

- Shows understanding of some words, including words for body parts and common objects
- Follows simple commands, like "Give me your shoe."
- Begins to understand emotions (i.e., mad versus happy) of others based on tone of voice

Talking

- Begins to point, gesture, and use vocalizations to show what he or she wants
- Tries again when his needs can't be understood the first time
- Imitates new sounds and syllables
- Says "Uh-oh!"
- Uses less babbling and more jargon. Jargon is combination of different sounds and syllables that sound like "jibber-jabber," such as "badidodiga."
- May begin to use a few real words

Socializing

- Waves more often for "hi" and "bye-bye"
- Wants to play simple games
- Starts jabbering and playing alongside with others

For more information, please contact the Division of Speech-Language Pathology at (513) 636-4341 or visit our website at www.cincinnatichildrens.org/speech.